

Judge: Richland murder suspect's statements can be used in trial

By Ty Beaver

Tri-City Herald
January 17, 2014



Joshua H. Hunt, 19, walks into Benton County Superior Court Friday to stand before Benton County Superior Court Judge Robert Swisher. Judge Swisher found probable cause to hold Hunt in the shooting death of Josh Snapp, 17, with a revolver Thursday morning. RICHARD DICKIN — Tri-City Herald [Buy Photo](#)

Statements made by a 19-year-old accused of killing a Richland teenager in July may be used at trial despite his attorney's objections.

Benton Superior Court Judge Carrie Runge ruled that Joshua H. Hunt knowingly and willfully spoke to investigators when he was interviewed after his arrest in the death of Josh Snapp.

Defense attorney Shannon Silverthorn said his client acknowledged he was drunk and high on methamphetamine and marijuana in the hours leading up to Snapp's death, clouding his judgment and understanding when dealing with investigators.

But Runge said there is no evidence that authorities coerced Hunt to make a statement, nor did he ever say he wished to remain silent or to have an attorney before talking to anyone. And investigators said there were no signs that Hunt was intoxicated while he was being interviewed hours after Snapp was killed.

"Clearly some time passed," Runge said.

Hunt and John C.I. Young, also 19, are charged with first-degree murder of Snapp on July 4. Authorities have said that Snapp, 17, was shot three times in the back and head.

Snapp was at an all-night party and left in the morning to go with Young and Hunt to smoke marijuana in a remote area near Richland, court documents said.

Hunt was reportedly jealous of Snapp's relationship with his girlfriend and saw the two together at the party, court documents said. Hunt was also upset with Snapp about a drug debt Snapp reportedly owed him, and Snapp allegedly had threatened to tell police Hunt was a drug dealer, said documents.

After firing two warning shots, Hunt took the revolver and shot Snapp in the chest, documents said. Young then allegedly shot the younger teen in the head and then they left him in the desert.

Hunt and Young reportedly drove to a Benton City gas station shortly after shooting Snapp, where Young told a clerk about the shooting. The clerk called police and Hunt and Young were arrested.

Prosecutor Andy Miller said it's clear Hunt knew he was giving a statement to investigators following his arrest, even though Hunt said he had used alcohol and drugs.

"That's actually proving he was able to remember the events of that night," Miller said.

Silverthorn said his client didn't verbally respond to authorities when he was advised of his rights to remain silent or to have an attorney when being interviewed.

His use of drugs and alcohol, combined with his relative youth, could have led him to not understand his rights or not realize he was giving a statement, the attorney said.

Testimony from a detective and two Benton County sheriff's deputies indicated Hunt never asked to remain silent or to have counsel despite being reminded of his rights at least twice before being interviewed, Runge said. Hunt also was not slurring or having trouble following interview questions.

Hunt is expected to be in court again Jan. 29 for a pretrial hearing. His trial is set to begin Feb 10.

At a previous hearing, Silverthorn said his client was considering filing an affidavit to remove Judge Runge from the case after learning her stepson was initially involved in the investigation.

Sheriff's Detective Scott Runge reviewed some video surveillance footage from the gas station where Hunt and Young were arrested, another investigator recently testified.

Silverthorn said his client wasn't comfortable with Judge Runge handling the case if she had a family member involved in the investigation. The judge refused to step down, saying she wasn't aware her stepson was involved until it came up during testimony and his role was minimal.

Benton County investigators ended up handing the investigation over to Richland police when it was discovered the death was in Richland, not Benton City where the suspects were arrested.

On Friday, Silverthorn said they reconsidered and would not ask Runge to step down.

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